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ABSTRACT

This paper describes West Texas State University's efforts to recruit Hispanic students and compares enrollment trends there with national statistics. West Texas State University (WTSU) is a small four-year college, located 12 miles south of Amarillo in Canyon (Texas). A review of enrollment trends in higher education notes that although minority enrollment has shown an increase, graduation rates for Hispanics are disappointing. In 1989-90, WTSU awarded 826 undergraduate degrees; 38 (5 percent) of these were awarded to Hispanic students. At WTSU, enrollment of Hispanic women has increased from 158 in 1987 to 221 in 1990, and enrollment of Hispanic men has increased from 143 in 1987 to 155 in 1990. A section describing the recruitment efforts at WTSU covers the work of a minority recruiter, a program aimed at local middle school students, print materials and outreach through the mail, work with federally funded student support services, parent education, and institutional obstacles. The next section describes WTSU's collaboration with the Texas Alliance for Minority Participation, which involves a summer pre-college program, stipends, internships, and scholarships. Student services at WTSU are also described, and they include a multicultural center and leadership training programs led by WTSU students at local high schools. A 19-item list of references is included. (JB)

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Abstract

Stating that "Hispanics are the most educationally segregated group in this country," the National Council of La Raza has called for increased governmental and community intervention programs to upgrade access to educational opportunities for Hispanics ("La Raza," 1992). West Texas State University, a small four-year college, located 12 miles south of Amarillo, is aggressively recruiting Hispanic students. This paper compares enrollment trends at WTSU with national statistics and describes the programs which have been implemented to recruit and retain Hispanics. Characteristics of successful programs are discussed, as well as suggestions for improving current recruitment and retainment efforts.

Recruitment and Retention of Hispanic Students

at West Texas State University

The National Council of La Raza in its "State of Hispanic America 1991 Report," declares: Hispanics are the most educationally segregated group in this country." Citing high school graduation rates that show only half of Hispanic adults having graduated from high school, as compared to four-fifths of whites and nearly two-thirds of blacks, the Council has called for a mix of increased government and community intervention ("La Raza," 1992). West Texas State University (WTSU), a small regional four-year college, located in the northern Texas Panhandle, is aggressively pursuing both governmental and community programs in its recruitment and retention of Hispanic students. This paper discusses enrollment trends at WTSU as compared with national data and describes successful recruitment and retention programs initiated by WTSU.

Enrollment Trends in Higher Education

From 1980 to 1989, enrollment in higher education in the United States increased to a record 13.5 million students. In 1988, the proportion of college students who were minorities rose to 18.9 percent. Much of this increase in

minority enrollment is attributed to sharply rising numbers of Hispanic and Asian students (Snyder & Hoffman, 1991). The most popular fields of study for 1989-90 Hispanic college graduates were 1) business and management, 2) education, and 3) social sciences (Morgan, 1992).

However, while minority enrollment has shown an increase, graduation rates for Hispanic students are disappointing. Looking at a study of 1984 college freshman, fifty-three percent of all students who entered college in 1984 completed a degree by 1990. For the same time period, only forty percent of Hispanic students earned a degree. White students had a 56 percent graduation rate (Gragasin, 1992).

Minority enrollment at Texas public universities increased between the fall of 1990 and the fall of 1991. Statewide, the number of Hispanic students increased 4.3 percent, from 58,765 to 61,297 by the fall of 1991. The University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg and the University of Texas at El Paso led all Texas institutions in fall 1991 Hispanic enrollment. During the time period from fall 1990 to fall 1991, WTSU experienced a 5.7 percent jump in Hispanic enrollment (Walton, 1992).

When WTSU student enrollment is analyzed according to geographical

origin, seventy-eight percent of the fall 1990 students came from the top twenty-six counties of the Texas Panhandle. Only five percent of fall 1990 students came from out-of-state, while fifteen percent were from other Texas locations (WTSU Institutional Data, January, 1991, p. 18). Obviously, WTSU's mission as a regional university is evident through this description. In 1989-90, WTSU awarded a total of 826 undergraduate degrees; thirty-eight (5 percent) of those were awarded to Hispanic students. The enrollment of Hispanic women has steadily increased from 158 in 1987 to 221 in 1990. Enrollment of Hispanic men has grown more slowly from 143 in 1987 to 155 in 1990 (WTSU Institutional Data, January 1991, p. 14).

While such figures seem to indicate minority gains in college attendance, the American Council on Education (ACE) is quick to point out that the number of Hispanic students in American higher education has shown little progress since 1985. ACE President Robert Atwell states: "The fiscal pressures on higher education . . . pose a clear threat to any hopes of continued improvements in opportunities for minorities" ("Council," 1992). In January, 1992, a state district judge in Texas ruled the state's system of higher education unconstitutional because it discriminates against Hispanics and called

for more equitable formulas for funding colleges and universities (Robbins, 1992). (Some feel that the Texas Panhandle has experienced more difficulties than other regions of the state because of the distribution of higher education funds.)

Skinner and Richardson (1988), profiling successful minority degree achievement, conclude: "Regional state colleges and universities . . . often have a tradition of serving as opportunity institutions for first generation college students". Part of that service, according to Skinner and Richardson, is an institution's willingness to "improve the preparation and opportunity orientation of its students" (p. 42). WTSU seems committed to achieving these two goals despite the fiscal constraints imposed on its recruitment and retention efforts.

Recruitment

WTSU has instigated several efforts to reach out to potential Hispanic students through the university's admissions office. In 1986, the university hired a minority recruiter. This position was originally developed for the purpose of recruiting **all** minority students, however, over time, the minority recruiter began specifically targeting the Hispanic community more heavily

than the other minority groups in the Texas Panhandle (TEOP Report). Currently, Lisa Maldonado serves as the minority recruiter. Her responsibilities include traveling to high schools, college fairs, and community colleges with high minority populations and serving as the contact person on campus for the minority students (Interview with L. Maldonado, May 18, 1992). Maldonado oversees the Target Middle School program, the minority brochure, the first generation letter, and Spanish letter mailings sponsored by the admissions office.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's 1990 Master Plan for Texas Higher Education called for institutions of higher learning to become involved with students at the elementary and secondary levels in an attempt to prevent dropouts and to make the students aware of their importance. The Target Middle School (TMS) program seeks to inform eighth graders and their parents about the possibilities of a college education. Through this program, the minority recruiter either visits specific middle schools with high minority populations or hosts on-campus events at WTSU for this group. The program emphasized the need for higher education. Information is provided to participants about what courses they should take in high school, financial aid

and scholarships, careers, degrees, and selecting a college. Through the TMS program, the admissions office hopes to reach those students who might otherwise rule out the possibility of going to college due to inadequate finances or other perceived obstacles (Interview with L. Maldonado, May 18, 1992).

Print materials produced by the admissions office include the First Generation letter, Spanish letters, and minority student brochures. The First Generation letter is aimed at students whose parents did not attend college. The contents of this letter emphasize that a college education can be a reality for these students, that they can proudly stand as the "first generation" of their families to complete a college degree, and that financial assistance is available to them. Spanish versions of this letter are sent to students enrolled in Texas public schools whose parents may not speak or read English. The minority brochure contains similar information.

Along with the continuation of these efforts, Maldonado would like to increase parental contact and work with Parent Teacher Associations. Maldonado suggests that greater cooperation between other departments on campus, such as student services and the minority student organizations such as Student Association for Black Unity and the Mexican American Association,

could enhance the recruiting efforts of the admissions office (Interview with L. Maldonado, May 18, 1992).

Martin Lopez, who currently works with the federally funded student support services at WTSU and who held the minority recruiter's position prior to Maldonado, identifies several obstacles Hispanic students desiring to attend college must overcome. He feels that the initial obstacle faced by an Hispanic teen-ager exists within their culture. Lopez explains that an Hispanic teen-ager who wishes to attend college receives more negative feedback from their families than do their Anglo counterparts. Hispanic students are often expected to enter the work force one they receive their high school diplomas. Their parents do not understand the necessity of a college education or the processes for applying for financial aid. As a recruiter, Lopez attempted to focus on both the potential students and their parents in order to build a positive picture of the benefits of higher education. Helping them understand the availability of financial aid also increased their access to a college degree (Interview with M. Lopez, April 14, 1992).

Public institutions which educate Hispanic students present the second obstacle to access to higher education. Lopez feels that educators in the public

schools hold lower expectations of Hispanic students than for Anglo students. Unfortunately, according to Lopez, some of the brightest, potentially successful Hispanic students leave the public school system feeling that they are not "college material." Lopez also indicates that students have told him that their high school guidance counselors did not inform them about the possibilities of attending college and often seemed to show little interest for or understanding of their abilities.

The Master Plan of Texas Higher Education (1990) corroborates Lopez's criticism of the public school system:

> Major factors contributing to the under-representation of minorities in higher education include a high drop-out rate from high school, poor academic preparation in public school, inadequate career counseling. . . low self-esteem, and frequent expectations of failure (p. 13).

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1987, May/June) explains that Hispanics rely on the advice of their teachers, counselors, and college recruiters in choosing a college more than other students (p. 35). Recruitment programs aimed at Hispanic students must convince them to believe in themselves and the possibilities of obtaining a college degree.

Texas Alliance for Minority Participation

Currently WTSU cooperates with Texas A&M and eight other universities, thirty-one community colleges, sixty-seven industry partners, and twelve national laboratories in a program called the Texas Alliance for Minority Participation. The Texas A&M System (TAMUS) developed the program in order to improve "the quality of the undergraduate and graduate education of minorities in engineering, mathematics, and the sciences through a program of enhanced preparation, recruitment, transfer and retention" (Erdman, Perry, Hiler, Hinojosa, 1991). The program is aimed at high school students, college freshman and sophomores, as well as minority students enrolled at community colleges. The Texas Alliance proposal not only provides financial support, but also provides academic and career counseling. The Texas Alliance intends to accomplish its goals though summer research internships, pre-college programs, and various stipends.

The proposal (Erdman et al.) refers to the summer research internship as the "backbone" of its efforts. The summer internships provide recipients the opportunity to work in the private sector or national research laboratories. The Texas Alliance asserts that such experience will aid minorities in

establishing themselves in careers once they receive their bachelor degrees or continue on into graduate programs. The work experience will help them either secure employment in the private sector or quality for research assistantships and scholarship at the Master's and Doctoral levels.

The pre-college program seeks to attract high school students to the fields of math, science, and engineering during summer programs at Laredo State University, Texas A&I, and Corpus Christi State University. The Texas Alliance will sponsor 275 minority students in these summer programs designed to strengthen problem solving skills and promote awareness, interest, and dedication to achieving the goal of entering college level engineering science and degree programs (Erdman, et al).

The Texas Alliance also provides several stipends to minority students enrolled in science and engineering. Transfer stipends will be awarded to minority students during the final year of science or pre-engineering tracks at community colleges. The purpose of these stipends is to enable minority students to enroll in four-year institution within the Texas Alliance who might not otherwise pursue a baccalaureate degree. Texas Alliance Stipends will be awarded to students at the nine four-year institutions. every student serving as

an intern automatically receives $1,500 for the academic year. The Texas Alliance additionally awards thirty Non-Traditional Scholarships valued at $500 to minority women with young children (Erdman, et al, p. 13). Dr. Horace Bailey, WTSU's representative to the Texas Alliance, explains that the Alliance requires that stipend recipients use any money received to pay off existing debts before spending the money in any other fashion (Interview with Dr. Bailey, April 15, 1992).

Although the program is designed to assist all minorities, the assistance provided for Hispanics is noteworthy. Specifically, the grant proposal targets African-Americans and Hispanics and seems to serves their needs more directly than the needs of other minority groups not detailed in the proposal. In its explanation of the Transfer Stipends, the proposal emphasizes that the majority of Hispanic youth who pursue post-high school education attend two-year community colleges do not continue their education toward a baccalaureate degree at a four-year institution. The availability of transfer stipends will encourage the matriculation between institutions.

Funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), this program supplies one million dollars a year for a five year period for scholarships,

stipends, and internships for Hispanic and African-American engineering, math, and science majors across the state of Texas. Most of the money (85%) from NSF is used for the "participant support stipends" (Erdman, et al., p. 20). Industrial members of the Texas Alliance also contribute heavily. Funds for summer internship programs and stipends are drawn from these contributions. The industrial contributions are expected to increase significantly over the five year period (Erdman, et al).

In its first year of operation, the Texas Alliance enjoyed less success than was expected. For the 400 awards available, there were only 150 applicants. At WTSU, only three students applied. Dr. Bailey reports that all three of these students received stipends, but expresses regret over the low number of minority students who were aware of the opportunities. Bailey concludes: "That just highlights the fact that we don't do a good job of recruiting minority students" (Interview with Dr. Bailey, April 15, 1992).

Student Services

Under the supervision of Mary Hill, Dean of Students, the office of student services has initiated two substantive programs assisting minority students. Since the Spring of 1990, student services has operated the

Multicultural Center which provides many services to minority students. Beginning in 1992, WTSU student leaders have held two leadership training conferences for Hispanic high school students in Brownsville, Texas, and in Amarillo, Texas.

Activities of the Multicultural Center are coordinated by graduate student, Sharon Yates and three minority undergraduate students. Yates sees the mission of the center as providing information to the entire student body about issues relating to minorities. The Center works to educate the student body through programs such as forum discussions and guest speakers. During 1992, the Multicultural Center brought in the following speakers: Judge Francine Totty, Texas Attorney General Dan Morales, Texas Railroad Commissioner Lena Guerrero, Judge Sylvia garcia, and Judge Carol Hobson. These speakers not only provided information, but also functioned as role models for minority students.

Yates would like to see greater involvement in student recruitment by the Multicultural Center. Plans are underway for the formation of a touring group of students dubbed the "Diversity Players," who will perform at nearby public schools in an effort to promote greater cultural awareness. As the

Multicultural Center works to increase the involvement and visibility of Hispanic students it is hoped that greater student participation will lead to higher retention levels. Research by Richardson, Simmons, and De los Santos (1987) reveals that universities most successful in retaining minorities are those that are successful in involving those students in university activities.

The leadership training conferences sponsored by student services provided training in motivation, goal setting, non-verbal communication, and parliamentary procedure. The Chachlaca Retreat held in Brownsville Texas in January, 1992, was attended by students from several South Texas high schools who had been identified as "leaders" by their principals and teachers. Of the thirty-five high school students attending, ten expressed an interest in attending WTSU, according to WTSU Student Body President Richard Perez. However, Perez is quick to point out that the main purpose of the conference was to increase leadership skills.

A similar retreat, directed by WTSU student leaders, was held in mid-May, 1992 at the Region 16 Educational Service Center, located in Amarillo, Texas. The students attending this conference were migrant students, many of whom had been in the United States for less than a year. Because of language

barriers, communication with this group presented a greater challenge. WTSU student leaders emphasized leadership skills, as well as the importance of high school graduation. Perez feels that this kind of outreach may be one of the most effective ways for WTSU to attract Hispanic students (Interview with Richard Perez, June 22, 1992).

Conclusions

Since no formula guaranteeing success in Hispanic recruitment and retention exists, attempts to offer critical suggestions tread on shaky ground. However, the following discussion is offered as a means of assisting other colleges and universities in improving their recruitment and retention efforts.

WTSU has made inroads in dealing with many of the major problems facing access of Hispanic students to higher education. The Target Middle School program and the leadership conferences combat the preparation barriers facing Hispanic students. The Multicultural Center works to involve minority students in the work of the university, assisting their social and academic progress. By participating in the Texas Alliance for Minority Participation, WTSU helps to offset financial burdens that limit access to higher education. Each of these programs is valuable and has experienced positive results.

However, increased progress in minority recruitment and retention would require WTSU to intensify and expand its current efforts. If the university could increase staff and funding, greater involvement with the public schools would be possible. Just as students in engineering and math have found assistance through the Texas Alliance program, students in all disciplines should have access to the same sort of financial aid and career initiatives. Coordination of the various recruitment and retention efforts would also lead to greater effectiveness.

Several plausible alternatives for improving the coordination of these activities exist. WTSU could centralize all its efforts concerning minority recruitment and retention into a single office of minority affairs. Such an office could efficiently design, initiate, and execute comprehensive programs to improve the academic and non-academic situation for Hispanic students. Centralization would lead to greater cohesiveness and consistency. However, such centralization would also run the risk of overlapping efforts with those of the admissions office which serves the university at large. Disadvantages to centralization include the risk of becoming single minded and rigid. The flexibility of the existing group of programs is one of its greatest assets.

Another alternative would be to have an assigned faculty member interface all of the academic and administrative minority affairs initiatives. Given a reduced teaching load would allow the faculty member to dedicate sufficient time to coordinating activities. A more probable solution would be to assign a graduate student assistant to serve as campus coordinator. If granted proper authority by the provost's office, this staff member could develop a comprehensive strategy for meeting the needs of Hispanic and other minority students, facilitate communication between the various entities charged with recruitment and retention, and oversee their activities. Forming a minority programs council composed of representatives from all of the offices that focus on recruitment and retention is an alternative which might be the most effective. Such a council through regular meetings, could develop congruent goals and strategies and coordinate schedules. In short, the left hand would not only know what the right hand is doing, both hands would work together.

If we are to increase Hispanic enrollment and retention in American higher education, programs like those pursued at WTSU must become the standard for all universities. We need to utilize the intellectual abilities of this significant population as we move toward the twenty-first century.

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